



# REPUBLIC OF ARTSAKH / NAGORNO KARABAKH

## Fact Sheet

### 1. General Profile and Geographic Location

**Territory:** 4,457 sq. miles (11,500 sq. km.)

**Population:** 152,000 (2018 est.)

**Religion:** Armenian Apostolic Christian

**Language:** Armenian

**Capital:** Stepanakert

**Other largest cities:** Shushi, Martuni, Martakert, Hadrout, Askeran, Chartar

One of the ancient Armenian principalities, Artsakh is located in the Eastern part of the Armenian Plateau.



Geographically, the Republic of Artsakh defines itself within the administrative borders of the former Soviet Union's Nagorno Karabakh Autonomous Region, and the adjacent Shahumian district. The name *Karabakh* has also been used for reference to the area since mid 18<sup>th</sup> century. In Persian, *Karabakh* means *dark (deep) forest*, while the original Armenian name *Artsakh* in the ancient Armenian similarly means *tsakh* (woods).

### 2. Brief History

#### a) Ancient times - 1991

History of Artsakh as an Armenian principality traces back to the 5<sup>th</sup> century B.C. It was the 10<sup>th</sup> province of the ancient Kingdom of Armenia. In Urartian inscriptions (9<sup>th</sup>- 7<sup>th</sup> centuries B.C.), the region was also referred to as *Urtekhini*. After division of Greater Armenia (387 A.D.), Artsakh became part of the Eastern Armenian Kingdom, which, however, soon fell under the Persian rule. Under Persia, Artsakh remained as an Armenian Province. Artsakh is also mentioned as part of the Armenian Kingdom of Bagratids (9<sup>th</sup>-11<sup>th</sup> cc.), and Zakarid Armenia (12<sup>th</sup>-13<sup>th</sup>).

In the following centuries, Artsakh fell under the rule of various powers, but remained Armenian. The principality has preserved a semi-independent status, and played an important role in the development of the Armenian statehood, culture and civilization. The region's political autonomy lasted uninterrupted up until the mid 18<sup>th</sup> century.

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During centuries of foreign invasions and attempts of conquer, Artsakh has been important for protecting the Armenian civilization. It also played a significant role in the development of the Armenian military traditions, and preserving Christian Armenian demographic profile. Despite consistent attempts by Turkic tribes to dilute Artsakh's ethnic composition, Armenians have always maintained their identity and demographic majority by forming at least 75% of population.

Artsakh is a place of rich cultural and spiritual heritage. The region is an open-sky treasure house of the Christian art, and architecture with hundreds of medieval churches, monasteries and tombstones, including a rich collection of ancient hand-carved stone crosses or *khach-qars*.



In the early 18<sup>th</sup> century, war with the Ottoman Turkey ravaged Artsakh. Local Armenians succumbed to the pressure by the significantly outnumbering foreign tribes, which eventually succeeded in their long-coveted goal of settling across the region. The result was the formation of the Karabakh Khanate - a self-proclaimed, but short-lived Muslim principality in Artsakh, which was absorbed into the Russian Empire in 1805, and abolished 40 years later. The new regional realities brought a century-long period of tranquility.

The Armenian-Turkic conflict in the Caucasus reemerged during the Armenian Genocide of 1915-1923, when close to 1.5 million Armenians were killed in the Ottoman Empire in an effort to end Armenian presence across the territory of what previously had been the Armenian Kingdom. The rise of Turkish nationalism in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century instigated renewed attacks on Armenian entities in the Caucasus, including Artsakh.

#### *b) Conflict with Azerbaijan; peace process*

The Karabakh issue emerged as an international dispute in 1918 with the fall of the Russian Empire, which raised the necessity of demarcating borders between Armenia (*which had restored independence*) and Azerbaijan (*which had appeared for the first time as a country on the political map*). The newly-created Azerbaijan, backed by Turkey, claimed authority over Armenian regions, including Artsakh. However, the League of Nations did not recognize Azerbaijani state because of the uncertainty of self-proclaimed entity's demographic composition, and territorial disputes with neighboring Armenia and Georgia. The antecedent of the United Nations also rejected all territorial claims by Azerbaijan. Artsakh has never been part of independent Azerbaijan.

The Soviet expansion to the South Caucasus has soon changed the regional geopolitics. Azerbaijan's claims for authority over Artsakh and other Armenian territories were withdrawn. In June 1921, Armenia declares Artsakh as its inseparable part. Relevant Decree by the Armenian Government became the last legal and legitimate document in terms of international law regarding the entity's status during the Soviet regime.



In 1921, following Turkey's assurances of the country's "pro-Communist intentions", as well as in order to prevent potential Armenian threat to the Soviet system, dictator Joseph Stalin (*then – member of the Russian Communist Party's Central Committee*), in violation of procedural and legal norms, pressured to cancel the previous decision, and incorporate Artsakh (*then - Karabakh*) into Soviet Azerbaijan, against the will of local population. In fact, official of one Soviet republic has forcefully imposed its vision of the demarcation of the border between two other republics.

Weakened by the Armenian Genocide, and continued aggression by Turkey and its allies, Armenia was unable to protect Artsakh, and prevent it from becoming a bargaining chip in the Soviet game. In 1923, as a compromise after a period of resistance, an Armenian autonomy was established on the mountainous part of Artsakh, on 40% of its historic area. Through further manipulations, the autonomy was soon turned into enclave in the Soviet Azerbaijan, with no land connection with Armenia.

For the subsequent seven decades, Azerbaijani authorities have implemented an overt campaign of national, ethnic, religious, cultural and economic discrimination, aimed at eliminating the region's Armenian heritage and demographic majority. Throughout the Soviet regime, Artsakh resisted the foreign rule, and has repeatedly appealed to the Central Government in Moscow to return the autonomy back under Armenian administration. In 1935, 1946, 1968 and 1977, the supreme legislature in Stepanakert has raised the issue of rights, and reunification with Armenia. However, the repressive system did not tolerate any demonstration of democratic aspirations, and all movements in Artsakh were brutally suppressed.



The new stage of the *Karabakh liberation movement* started in 1988, when the new era of *Perestroika* and *Glasnost* seemed to contain new opportunities for the democratic aspirations in Artsakh. Legal and peaceful demand through rallies and demonstrations for rectifying Stalin's policy of gerrymandering became the first truly democratic process in then-Soviet area. The movement sparked similar processes across the USSR, and is largely perceived as the movement that eventually led to fall of the Soviet Union. However, the legal and legitimate

demands of Karabakh Armenians were yet again denied.

Collapse of the USSR in 1991 allowed Artsakh to legitimately reject Azerbaijani rule, and establish itself through national referendum as a free and sovereign state. Establishment of the Republic of Artsakh (September 2, 1991), and declaration of independence (January 6, 1992) have been realized in full compliance with then effective legislation, and international norms.



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Azerbaijan's authorities have once again appeared to be unable or unwilling to deal with the Artsakh issue in a civilized manner. A full-scale military aggression by Azerbaijan against (*then enclave*) Artsakh lasted from 1991 until May of 1994, when a cease-fire agreement was co-signed between Artsakh, Azerbaijan and Armenia.

Since 1992, the Minsk Group of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), co-chaired by the United States, France and Russia has been the main format to deal with the dispute. Throughout the years of mediation efforts, the Group has come up with several peace proposals, seeking to reach a settlement acceptable to all sides, based on fundamental tenets of international law, democratic values, and humanitarian principles. However, Azerbaijan's continued incitement of anti-Armenian hate, its military escalation, and outright claims to all of Artsakh's and even Armenia's territory, make it clear that Azerbaijan has no interest in being a partner for peace.

Artsakh remains, nonetheless, committed to a durable and democratic peace based upon a constructive regional coexistence of Artsakh, Armenia and Azerbaijan.

### **3. Achievements since independence**



Despite the ongoing blockade by Azerbaijan, and the results of the devastating war of 1991-1994, the Republic of Artsakh has reached tangible achievements in economic development and democratic state-building.

Today, the Republic continues to develop as a viable state, with democratically elected leadership, market economy and a vibrant civil society. The republic has adopted a set of democracy-related laws. Several rounds of presidential, parliamentary and local administration elections were all assessed by international observers from major democracies as free and transparent.



Anti-corruption and tax reforms led to a steady economic growth, and created favorable environment for domestic and foreign investments. In 2019, Artsakh has reached energy self-sufficiency, and now exports clean energy, agricultural and IT products, as well as a range of other traditional and new types of goods.



Sovereignty of Artsakh has solid historical, legal and moral bases. The Republic remains open to the international community, and is ready to assume its part of the responsibility for the stability and cooperation in the South Caucasus and beyond.

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